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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

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~ Google Banning Windows! ~ People Are Talking! ~ 'Likejacking' Scam!
~ Bing Cashback Is Ending ~ Web Addicts Starve Kid ~ Students Free Speech?
~ Exams? Web Cafes Close! ~ Firefox Revamp Planned ~ 30,000 Quit Facebook!

~ Remote Sabotage Warning ~ Chrome Coming in Fall! ~ iPad "Rivals" Shown!

-* Man Implants Computer Virus! *-
-* Do You Know Your Connection Speed? *-
-* 'Tabnapping' Attack Phishes Browser Tabs! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"*****"

"Saying it like it is!"

It's been another long and tiring week!! Nice weather, however, but a little too hot and humid for my tastes, on occasion. I got good and "baked" working out on the golf course; but at least I'm starting to get some color and shed that "pasty-white" look from a long winter. It will probably be a wet weekend, so maybe I'll have to forego my outdoor projects and have a chance to unwind - we'll see!

The oil "spill" disaster is still making top headlines, and likely will for a very long time to come. I really don't know what more can be said about this tragic event. As I mentioned last week, I don't understand the lack of a "disaster plan" to be able to respond to such an event more quickly and productively. But, we're well beyond that point now, and now we all have to deal with the fallout. It will eventually be resolved, but the most difficult part of all of this is what will be the final cost. And, I'm not talking about dollars; I'm referring to the wildlife and everything (and everyone) impacted by the oil - now and in the future. Tragic almost doesn't seem to be a word to accurately describe this mess.

Another story that's come up in the news headlines, and one story appearing in this week's issue - the freedom of speech rights of students. The question seems to be: do students have the right to post comments online that are derogatory toward teachers, other students, or whatever, for that matter?

If we're discussing students using school equipment, or making these posts during school hours or while at school functions, I'd say that their rights are drastically reduced, if not void. But, what if a student sets up a page on MySpace, or Facebook, or wherever, and writes things about a teacher. You know the type of stuff that I mean - the derogatory stuff, including made-up comments, and even outright lies?

Personally, as long as there are no threats or other "criminal" commentary, I think a student has the right to blow off steam. His own time, his own computer, his own online resource - his rights to free speech. There are legal limitations to free speech, but yelling "FIRE!" on a crowded Facebook page is not the same as doing so in a crowded theater. The realm of the online world offers new challenges, and need to be considered. Good luck with that!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, I'm getting really depressed because there just isn't enough fodder in the NewsGroup for a column again. It's to be expected, I guess, for several reasons.

First, Atari hasn't produced a computer in... what?... almost two decades? And by that time, they were primarily focused on selling existing technology instead of innovating and doing truly groundbreaking STuff. After 16 or 17 years, the userbase has dwindled.

Second, the impending demise of the UseNet... fewer and fewer ISPs are providing UseNet access, and options like GoogleGroups just don't 'feel' the same. So less people using less options to post leads to a slow, sluggish NewsGroup.

Third, the users who DO participate are usually much more savvy than the average computer user, and much less in need of the kind of assistance that the Atari NewsGroups were known for.

So there it is; the UseNet Death Triple Threat: Fewer users, less access, less need.

I guess the only thing left for me to do is to rant and rave about the state of the world.

First and foremost on everyone's mind... at least it should be.. the Gulf Oil 'Spill'.

What a monster this thing is! I mean, I think we're JUST starting to come to terms with what a catastrophe it really is. I take no joy in the fact that I was one of the voices in the background during the last elections when others were yelling "Drill baby, drill!" pointing out just what COULD happen if something went wrong. No, I'm not an expert, and I don't claim that I had any sort of prescience that told me that this WOULD happen, but the possibility DID worry me. I never imagined a well the size or strength of this one "getting away from us". I mean, on dry land, they usually have to pump stuff INTO an oil field to get oil out. This one, and I don't have the education to know why, is gushing like... like... I WAS going to say "Old Faithful", but the geyser pales in comparison. It's like the unbelievable pressure on the sea floor is 'squishing' it out like a 20 inch opening in a huge tube of yucky disgusting toothpaste. And, while I'm not saying that it's never going to stop... it WOULD slow and stop on its own eventually... it would be much better if it was sooner rather than later.

I know I said it just a paragraph ago, but this thing is a catastrophe. I don't think we can yet imagine the damage its going to do. Do to the ocean itself, the things that live in it... the fish and shrimp and shellfish and crustaceans we all love so much, the plankton that produces the oxygen we breathe, the wetlands that are home to all manner of wildlife, and even the shorelines and beaches... let's see how these politicians

react when some of their multi-million dollar seaside homes lose value because of the thick, tarry sludge all over the place... the cost to shipping companies that will have to clean their vessels to get rid of the gunk.

Yeah, let's see who's yelling "Drill baby, drill" then.

And, mark my words, there will be problems and repercussions that we haven't even thought of yet. Things that were never considered, either because they were never envisioned or, worse, because they were too terrible to consider. Imagine a huge 'dead zone' in the middle of the Gulf... a spot where nothing grows. The water dead and sterile to the very bottom of the sea, no oxygen being produced, just rot and decay and death to any wildlife that intrudes into the bubble of dead, empty water. Now, experts will give you a dozen reasons why that won't happen... or maybe a dozen reasons that, if it does happen, it won't last long... but I don't find that comforting right now, just like I don't find predictions that sunlight will break up the oil 'quickly' or that Mother Earth will take care of itself reassuring.

On that last point... I have no doubt but that Mother Earth WILL take care of herself. No matter what we humans do, the Earth will still be here. She may take eons to do it, but she's got the time. Eventually she'll end up right where she 'wants' to be. That may or may not include us. For the four point something billion years that the earth had been around, mankind has been here, in our currently recognizable form, for around.. oh, let's say sixty thousand years. Even if you count our earliest 'homo' ancestors, that only brings us about 2.5 million years. 2.5 million out of over four billion. Clearly, we're just visitors on the face of this planet, here for a relatively insignificant portion of time. Hell, the dinosaurs were here for hundreds of millions of years before dying out. What makes us any more 'special' or entitled?

And for those of you who are about to burst a blood vessel shouting that the Earth is only six thousand years old, tell me how what we're doing fulfills the Creator's wish that we... "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth"? Does dominion imply only indiscriminate use for whatever we choose? Or does it carry with it a responsibility? Are we not, in that case, custodians of this marvelous and wondrous place?

There is one other thing I'd like to mention before leaving you to scratch your head and wish I'd just talk about printed circuits and flash drives, and that is this tendency of ours to want to place blame and, in having placed it, feel that we've done our part.

I hear a lot of people all over, in print media as well as on radio and television and on the internet, pointing fingers. Haliburton, British Petroleum, Transocean Ltd., the Obama administration, Congress... there are plenty of names and faces upon which to hang blame, that's for sure.

But I really don't care with whom the ultimate responsibility rests at the moment. The problem is upon us now, and while the adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" rings in my ears, I wonder if we will take away from this disaster any lessons that we might be able to use down the road. Heck, I don't know if we're smart enough to let the lessons sink in when there's the the possibility of more oil, more money, more... power.

I mean, look at global warming. We have evidence all around us that the

That's about it for this week, folks. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

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Blade Kitten marks the latest creation by Mr. Stamatiadis, who is also the force behind the multi-million selling TY the Tasmanian Tiger series. In Blade Kitten, a prequel to the comics set three years prior, players are invited into the world of Hollow Wish where they take on the role of Kit

Ballard, one of the best bounty hunters in the business. With her pink hair and tail, Kit is part cat, part girl - and fully lethal. As one of the last of her species, Kit commands her unique "Darque Blade" hovering sword to defeat enemies. Also along for the ride is Skiffy, Kit's laid-back sidekick who lends a hand in collecting items, solving puzzles, and when needed, serves as Kit's protector.

Blade Kitten goes beyond most downloadable titles to deliver a strong narrative, with high-quality cinematics, and a colorful, frenetic visual style, that lends to the pick-up-and-play arcade action. Players will jump right in and easily begin exploring and fighting their way through 19 levels, including three exploration levels with Noot (a rideable alien mount). Blade Kitten also features straight forward gameplay mechanics, intuitive "scramble style" exploration, fully voiced dialogue, dramatic narrative and powerful visual direction.

EA Brings NHL Game to Wii

Wayne Gretzky admits it: The Great One is just an average hockey player.

Well, not really. Only when it comes to EA Sports' National Hockey League franchise coming to the Nintendo Wii in September, just in time for the start of the next season.

"I'd be what would be considered a 10 goal scorer if I was comparing this to the NHL," the Hockey Hall of Fame player joked in an interview with The Associated Press.

And that's not too good considering that during his 21 years in the NHL Gretzky accumulated a long list of accomplishments and awards and is the only player to have ever recorded 200 points in a season.

Gretzky is also one of the first hockey players to have his name associated with a video game. He is teaming up with EA as it skates into its first version of its NHL for the Wii with "NHL Slapshot."

For sports fans who grew up dreaming of being Gretzky, this is their chance - hockey stick and all.

Producers of the franchise say "NHL Slapshot" will capitalize on some of the best features from its top-selling PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 teammates, but takes the game even further by using a hockey stick as the controller.

"It's one of the those games that you could sit down and you'll be able to play for hours. It's very realistic ... it's almost like playing in the NHL," Gretzky said. "People as much as they love to sit down and play video games, they also love to sort of participate and pretend like they're actually playing."

Gretzky said video games have come a long way since he graced the cover of Nintendo's "Wayne Gretzky Hockey" in 1991. Certainly the graphics are better, the game is more realistic and players have more control over their simulated counterparts on the TV screen.

"It's like the game of hockey itself, the game keeps getting better every 10 years," Gretzky said. "There's no question the game is better

today, which is exciting for everyone."

For the controller, players fit the Wii Remote and Nunchuk into a hockey stick casing complete with a foam stick blade. Players use the hockey stick to take shots on net, move around players and check opponents into the boards or lift another player's stick. Players also have the ability to play as the goalie using the Wii controllers as the glove and blocker.

"It's just such a natural extension to use the Wii with the motion controls to make a hockey stick," said David Littman, creative director for EA's NHL franchise, who took one of his most expensive hockey sticks, cut it up and duct-taped the controllers to the stick to make a prototype.

"It doesn't matter if you're 6 years old or 60 years old, when you look at the stick and you put it in your hands, and you take your first slapshot, it doesn't matter what age you are, it just is this incredible experience."

Among the highlights are the split-screen and minigames, as well as the "Pee Wee to Pro" mode that lets users create a 10-year-old version of themselves playing on a backyard rink and work their way up to the NHL. Players can also choose to play as a "peewee" version of Gretzky and some of hockey's other great stars. Gretzky also serves as a coach in the "Pee Wee to Pro" mode giving players tips to get to the NHL.

"If you are somebody that has loved hockey ... Wayne's pretty much as big as it gets," said lead producer Joe Nickolls.

And with the new title, EA is again facing off against one of its main opponents, so to speak.

EA's NHL series is among the top five-selling sports games in the world. For years, both EA and 2K Sports created competing NHL franchises for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. Then 2K Sports decided to focus its NHL efforts for 2011 on the Wii, ditching versions for the other consoles at least for the year.

"We make games for the consoles when we believe it's right and we're going to make the best game," Nickolls said. "For sure there's competition from lots of different players for all of our sports games. Yes, we pay attention to them, but it really doesn't change how we make them."

The technology used for the Wii version also may be a precursor to versions using motion control technology planned for both PlayStation3 and Xbox 360.

"This is going to be a really good test," Littman said.

Take-Two Lands Michael Jordan for NBA Video Game

Basketball superstar Michael Jordan will help develop the upcoming "NBA 2K11" video game and will be on its cover.

That's a departure from a typical cover deal with athletes, according to Jason Argent, vice president of marketing at Take-Two Interactive

Software Inc.'s 2K Sports, which is publishing the game.

Typically, the game maker simply hands over a check. Argent said Jordan will work closely with the game's developers, right down to such details as whether a character's elbow in the game is at the correct angle for a shot. Players will be able to play Jordan's character to vicariously slam-dunk their way to victory from the comfort of their couch.

The company provided little information about how the game will look and would not disclose financial details about the deal with Jordan.

The game will go on sale October 5.

The last basketball cover athlete for 2K's NBA game was Kobe Bryant.

Video game deals are lucrative for top athletes. Tiger Woods is among the best-known sports figures with an ongoing game deal with Take-Two rival Electronic Arts Inc.

EA is also launching an NBA game in the fall. The company said Wednesday the game will be called "NBA Elite 11," a name change for EA's long-running "NBA Live" franchise.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Google Banning Windows over Security Concerns

A report in the Financial Times claims that Google has begun moving users off of Windows systems and made it very difficult to get new ones.

The move is cast as a security measure. Users are being shifted primarily on to Mac systems, but also to Linux.

Even prior to their brush with hackers from China late last year Google had a policy of moving users on to Google products where possible. The incidents accelerated the process. The story quotes Google employees to the effect that Windows systems are distrusted by definition at the company.

Something feels exaggerated in the story to me. First, from all indications we have in published reports, the system compromised at Google wasn't just a Windows system, but a Windows XP system running Internet Explorer 6 and logged in as Administrator. In other words, it was a system on which no serious effort at security was made. Banning all Windows systems because of this is surely an irrational overreaction.

Google is a savvy enough company to know this, and also to know that Macs aren't, as the FT story claims, less vulnerable to hackers. In a targeted attack such as that which compromised Google, the Mac is at

least as vulnerable. Google would secure themselves much more effectively and cheaply by using Windows 7 in a managed environment.

Facebook Users Warned of 'Likejacking' Scam

Internet security firm Sophos has warned Facebook users to be on the alert for a scam which sends a spam message to all of their friends on the social network.

Sophos, in a pair of blog posts late Monday, said "hundreds of thousands" of Facebook users have fallen for the scam which it dubbed "likejacking."

It said some Facebook users had received a message such as "This man takes a picture of himself EVERYDAY for 8 YEARS!!" and were encouraged to click on a link.

Sophos said clicking on the link takes a Facebook user to what appears to be a blank page with a "Click here to continue" message.

Sophos said clicking on the page publishes the original message on their own Facebook page with a "like" notation and recommends it to all of their Facebook friends.

"This of course posts a message to your newsfeed, your friends see it and click on it, and so it spreads," Sophos said.

Sophos warned last week about a Facebook scam designed to trick users into installing adware, a software package that automatically plays, displays or downloads advertisements to their computer.

That followed a similar scam that spread on Facebook the week before involving a fake posting tagged as the "sexiest video ever," according to Sophos.

'Tabnapping' Attack Phishes Browser Tabs

Aza Raskin is the creative lead for Mozilla's Firefox (who also makes makes cardboard furniture, but today he's making headlines for discovering a new kind of phishing attack.

"Tabnapping" involves using Javascript to change the contents of one tab while a user is focused on another. Raskin's demonstration Web page shows the technique.

The attack should work in any tabbed browser, though the user must first navigate to a malicious Web page. I suppose it's possible, although Raskin doesn't discuss it, that this attack could be forced on another page through cross-site scripting.

Script in the malicious page looks to see if the tab has lost focus, i.e. that the user is looking at another tab. After a few seconds of this, it changes the favicon and the contents of the page to a phishing page, but the URL doesn't changed.

The idea is that you may be alert to possible phishing when you load a page, but you're not thinking that a page will turn to a phishing attack after it's already loaded. You enter your credentials and you're off.

The attack worked for me while I was in Chrome, except that the favicon didn't change.

US Cyber Command Chief Warns of 'Remote Sabotage'

The top US cyberwarrior said Thursday that Pentagon networks are probed over six million times a day and expressed concern about a rise in "remote sabotage" attacks on computer systems.

General Keith Alexander, head of the newly created US Cyber Command, also said developing a real-time picture of threats to US military networks and the rules to fight back would be among his priorities.

Alexander, who also heads the National Security Agency, the super secret US surveillance agency, said Pentagon systems are "probed by unauthorized users approximately 250,000 times an hour, over six million times a day."

In his first public remarks since assuming command of Cyber Command two weeks ago, Alexander said the US military "depends on its networks for command and control, communications, intelligence, operations and logistics."

"We at the Department of Defense have more than seven million machines to protect linked-in 15,000 networks," he said in a speech to cybersecurity experts and reporters at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The role of US Cyber Command is to "deter, detect and defend against emerging threats against our nation in cyberspace," Alexander said.

"Our nation's interests are in jeopardy," he said citing "tremendous vulnerabilities" and threats from a "growing array of foreign actors, terrorists, criminal groups and individual hackers."

"Cyberspace has become a critical enabler for all elements of national and military power," Alexander said. "Our data must be protected."

The four-star general said distributed denial of service (DDOS) attacks on Estonia and Georgia in 2007 and 2008 were aimed at temporarily shutting down computer networks but new threats have emerged.

"There are hints that some penetrations are targeting systems for remote sabotage," he said. "The potential for sabotage and destruction is now possible and something we must treat very seriously."

Alexander said the military and government needed to increase their ability to see what is happening on computer networks in real-time.

"We have no situational awareness, it's very limited. We do not have a common operating picture for our networks," he said.

"We need real-time situational awareness on our network to see where something bad is happening and take action there at that time," he said. "We must share indications and warning threat data at net speed."

Alexander said more "clear rules of engagement" needed to be established over how to respond to cyberattacks.

"We have to look at it in two different venues - what we're doing in peacetime and in wartime," he said. "Those things that you do in wartime, I think, are going to be different from what you do in peacetime."

A Russian proposal to create a cyberwarfare arms limitation treaty could be "a starting point for international debate" but "at levels above me," he said.

Alexander said effective cybersecurity would involve partnering with the private sector and others.

"All of us in government recognize that we cannot do this without the help of industry, academia and our allies," he said. "Securing cyberspace is a team sport."

"Securing our networks is not just a (military) issue it is a national security issue with implications for all instruments of national power," he said.

Alexander said the NSA, whose warrantless wiretapping program has been ruled illegal by a US judge, takes civil liberties and privacy "very seriously" and is subject to strict oversight by Congress and the courts.

"My responsibility as director of NSA is to ensure that what we do comports with the law," he said. "Every action that we take we have legal reviews of it all the way up or down."

"It doesn't mean we won't make a mistake," he said.

"The hard part is we can't go out and tell everybody exactly what we do because we give up capability that may be extremely useful in protecting our country and our allies," he said.

Most U.S. Broadband Users Don't Know Connection Speeds

Four of five U.S. broadband users are unaware of the speed of their connections, the Federal Communications Commission said on Tuesday.

A similar survey conducted by Abt/SRBI and Princeton Survey Research Associates International from April 19 to May 2 also found that one in six American mobile phone users have been shocked by surprise fees and charges in their monthly bills.

The FCC has increasingly focused on consumer protection issues surrounding broadband speeds and mobile phone charges, including fees associated with ending a contract early.

"Speed matters," FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski said in a statement. "The more broadband subscribers know about what speeds they need and

what speeds they get, the more they can make the market work and push faster speeds over broadband networks."

In March, the FCC unveiled an Internet speed test tool at www.broadband.gov for consumers to clock the speed of their connection.

The FCC said it is also seeking 10,000 U.S. volunteers to participate in a scientific study to measure home broadband speed in the U.S.

Specialized hardware will be installed in the homes of volunteers to measure the performance of all the country's major Internet service providers across geographic regions and service tiers, the FCC said.

The FCC said it is partnering with SamKnows Limited, the same firm that conducted a similar test in the United Kingdom, to carry out the U.S. study.

The biggest U.S. broadband providers are Comcast Corp, Time Warner Cable Inc, AT&T Inc and Verizon Communications Inc.

FCC Plans Study To Measure Broadband Speeds

The Federal Communications Commission wants to find out whether broadband providers are delivering Internet connections that are as fast as advertised.

The FCC is seeking 10,000 volunteers to take part in a study of residential broadband speeds. Specialized equipment will be installed in homes across the country to measure Internet connections. Those results will then be compared with advertised speeds. The agency hopes to get a cross section of volunteers who subscribe to broadband services provided by a range of phone and cable TV companies.

The new project grows out of several proposals outlined in the FCC's national broadband plan, released in March. The plan calls for the government to collect, analyze and publish detailed information, market by market, on broadband pricing and competition. The plan also recommends that the government require broadband providers to disclose information about pricing and performance.

"The big issue here is knowing what you are paying for," said Joel Gurin, who heads the FCC's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau.

According to data cited in the national broadband plan, average residential download speeds are typically only half as fast as the maximum speeds advertised by U.S. broadband providers.

Meanwhile, survey results released by the FCC on Tuesday found that while 91 percent of broadband users say they are at least somewhat satisfied with their home connection speeds, 80 percent of broadband users do not know how fast their home connections are.

The survey, based on phone interviews with more than 3,000 adults from April 19 to May 2, found that 71 percent of mobile broadband users are at least somewhat satisfied with their connection speeds.

The FCC will summarize its findings on home broadband connections in a

report later this year. The commission is also seeking input on ways to measure mobile broadband speeds.

The agency already offers several online tools to let consumers get a more basic reading of their home broadband speeds at <http://www.broadband.gov/qualitytest/about/>.

Broadband subscribers who want to participate in the FCC's new study can register at <http://www.TestMyISP.com>.

Mozilla Plans Firefox Revamp as IE Gains Market Share

Mozilla is moving to revamp its browser in advance of the release of Firefox 4 toward the end of the year, with one of the priorities the transformation of the user interface to be less cluttered and more visually appealing. But Mozilla will need to move fast if it's going to counter the surprising growth that Internet Explorer racked up in the U.S. market last month.

Mozilla has high hopes for an experimental service called Weaver Sync, which gives users access to their browser data across multiple computing platforms. Renamed Firefox Sync, the technology indexes and encrypts the user's browser history, passwords, bookmarks, form information, preferences and tabs for remote storage on a server.

The bad news for Mozilla is that Microsoft's IE gained more than three-quarters of a percent of market share across all operating systems during May in the U.S., according to Net Applications. By contrast, the market shares held by Google's Chrome and Firefox slipped almost 0.5 percent and 0.25 percent, respectively.

It has been quite a while since IE last made the kind of gains seen in the U.S. for May, noted Net Applications Executive Vice President Vince Vizzaccaro. "As for the reasons why, it appears Microsoft is segmenting the browser market geographically and attacking each segment the best way they see fit," Vizzaccaro said.

The U.S. is Microsoft's core market and therefore a top-priority segment, Vizzaccaro said. "I think the market's acceptance of IE8 along with the knowledge that IE9 is coming soon are providing consumers confidence that Microsoft will continue to devote resources to ongoing improvement of IE," Vizzaccaro added. "I wouldn't at all be surprised to see other geographical segments start to show the rebound we've seen in the U.S."

The news isn't any better for Mozilla on the global front, where IE8 held more than a 31 percent share of all Windows-based PCs in May, Net Applications reported. During the month, IE8 racked up a 1.34 percent increase -- a higher rate than any of its competitors. Google Chrome continued to grow its global market share by 0.3 percent last month, but Firefox's share slid 0.24 percent.

Through the introduction of a new "in-content UI" style that visually unifies various secondary UI components, Mozilla designer Stephen Horlander intends to give Firefox 4 a face-lift that "looks appealing, connects the variety of different types of UI, is recognizably in-content UI, and can be styled per platform," Horlander wrote in a

blog. "There is a lot of flexibility for different things within the style."

As for Firefox Sync, Mozilla aficionados need not wait for Firefox 4 to start benefiting from the technology. A free add-on is already available for download that enables browser users to securely access their personal data - including bookmarks, saved passwords, browsing history, and open browser tabs - across all of the user's supported devices.

"This makes the web experience instantly more personal and useful while ensuring that all of the user's data is encrypted end-to-end," wrote Mozilla Labs developers Ragavan Srinivasan and Mike Hanson in a blog.

The developers also noted that Mozilla has been working on an iPhone app called Firefox Home that is also based on Firefox Sync technology. "It will give iPhone users instant access to their Firefox browsing history, bookmarks and the set of tabs from their most recent browser session, in addition to having 'Awesome Bar' capability," they wrote.

Google Sets "Late Fall" Release for Chrome

Google expects to release its Chrome computer operating system in the "late fall", a top executive said on Wednesday, as it aims a competitive strike at rival Microsoft's Windows.

The Chrome system will be designed initially to work on laptop PCs, Sundar Pichai, Google's head of the Chrome project told reporters at the Computex PC show.

"We will be selective on how we come to market because we want to deliver a great user experience," he said. "We're thinking on both the hardware and software levels."

Google is seeking to challenge the dominance of Microsoft's Windows operating system, which currently runs on more than 90 percent of all personal computers currently.

Microsoft on Thursday waved off Google's efforts to develop an open source operating system, saying that software developers would have to create different versions of the same application for different brands.

Pichai disputed that contention, saying the similarity in the base core would mean software companies would not have to develop a new version for Chrome.

"Chrome OS is one of the few future operating systems for which there are already millions of applications that work," Pichai said. "You don't need to redesign Gmail for it to work on Chrome. Facebook does not need to write a new app for Chrome."

Open source software allows tech companies such as Acer to develop their own versions of the software using the skeleton provided by Google to fit their own needs, and its presentation may differ between brands.

The Chrome operating system will be centred around the web browser, with all software including high-end applications such as those used in photo and video editing housed in external servers known as a cloud.

Over a Dozen iPad Rivals Shown at Computex

Companies showed off over a dozen new rivals for the iPad at Computex this year, including a nifty 10-inch touchscreen tablet that docks into a speaker from Compal Electronics.

The number of tablets at Computex Taipei 2010 pays testimony to the trend Apple set in motion in April. Now that the company has sold 2 million iPads in just under two months, PC vendors globally want a piece of the action.

In the weeks leading up to Computex, it appeared Google might sweep the show with Android-based tablets, but Microsoft swooped in with some key victories and the launch of Windows Embedded Compact 7 software for small devices.

One company that says it will make tablets using Android, Windows and the MeeGo software developed by Intel and Nokia, also showed off one of the neatest devices at Computex, complete with its own user interface (UI) and speaker-dock.

Demand for tablets has risen thanks to the iPad, Compal CEO Ray Chen said at the show, adding that, "we have a lot of customers that are very interested in tablets."

The company's tablet uses Android version 2.1 and is on offer to PC vendors worldwide. Compal creates designs for vendors to choose from, then manufactures the devices at factories in China.

Acer, the world's second-biggest PC vendor, offered a glimpse of its own prototype Android tablet just prior to Computex, at a news conference in Beijing. It has a 7-inch display and a keypad, but Acer didn't say when it might be released or how much it will cost.

Several smaller Taiwanese and Chinese companies had Android-based tablets at their Computex booths, including Browan Communications, Firststone Technology, Digitran and FuJian Sanxi Electronics.

Arm Holdings, which designs the processing cores popular in Android devices, estimates there will be about 40 tablet devices made using Arm-based processors this year, and several e-readers.

"Android has become remarkably popular in a short space of time," said Tudor Brown, president of Arm, at a news conference in Taipei.

Three Android tablets were on display at Arm's private showroom at Computex: Foxconn's N928-1 with a 10-inch touchscreen; Lifepad by Prowave with a 7-inch touchscreen; and Micro-Star International (MSI) also showed off an Android-based tablet PC called the Wind Pad 110 at a news conference, but the company will launch a Windows-based tablet first, a strategy some of its rivals also announced.

MSI's Wind Pad 100 has Microsoft's Windows 7 on board, a 10-inch display and a UI developed by MSI. It also features built-in 3G and Wi-Fi, GPS and HDMI high-definition video output. It will be available later this year.

Asustek Computer (Asus) also debuted its first tablets, two Eee Pads running Windows software.

A tablet PC from Asustek with Android on board was displayed at the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) early this year, but the device did not appear at Computex. Asustek Chairman Jonney Shih said he's not sure the market is ready yet for Android-based tablets.

Shih said the launch of the iPad has created a unique opportunity for tablet-style devices and he expects demand for such products to grow this year.

Apple launched the iPad on April 3 in the U.S. and last week started selling them overseas in markets including Australia, Germany, Japan and the U.K.

Computex is one of Asia's largest electronics trade shows. The exhibition usually offers a view of what products consumers will see on world markets later this year.

30,000 Quit Facebook in Protest

A group protesting Facebook's privacy policies said Monday more than 30,000 people had heeded its call to quit the social networking giant.

"For us it comes down to two things: fair choices and best intentions. In our view, Facebook doesn't do a good job in either department," the organizers, who did not identify themselves, said on their website for Monday's "Quit Facebook Day."

"Facebook gives you choices about how to manage your data, but they aren't fair choices."

The group said at 2300 GMT that 32,749 had dropped out of the Facebook universe.

Facebook.com is visited monthly by 540 million people, or slightly more than 35 percent of the Internet population, according to Google data.

Facebook is overhauling privacy controls in the face of a barrage of criticism that it is betraying the trust which has made it the world's biggest social network.

Facebook redesigned its privacy settings page to provide a single control for content and "significantly reduce" the amount of information that is always visible to everyone.

Facebook also said it is giving users more control over how outside applications or websites access information at the service.

Critics continue to call for Facebook to make all user information private by default and then let people designate what they want to share case-by-case in an "opt-in" model.

US Court Weighs School Discipline for Web Posts

A U.S. appeals court heard arguments Thursday over whether school officials can discipline students for making lewd, harassing or juvenile Internet postings from off-campus computers.

Two students from two different Pennsylvania school districts are fighting suspensions they received for posting derisive profiles of their principals on MySpace from home computers. The American Civil Liberties Union argued that school officials infringe on student's free speech rights when they reach beyond school grounds in such cases to impose discipline.

"While children are in school, they are under the custody and tutelage of the school," ACLU lawyer Witold Walczak argued Thursday in the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. "Once they leave the schoolhouse gate, you've got parents that come into play."

But a lawyer for the Hermitage School District in western Pennsylvania offered a different view.

"It's not a matter of where you throw the grenade, it's where the grenade lands," Anthony Sanchez said.

The appeals court agreed to rehear the two cases in a rare en banc session - with all 14 eligible judges on the bench - after its judges issued conflicting rulings in the two cases in February. One three-judge panel upheld a girl's suspension, while another found the suspension of a boy unconstitutional.

Such disparities are common around the country as school districts wrestle with how to address online behavior that can range from pranks to threats to cyberbullying.

Some school officials mete out discipline, opening themselves to lawsuits, or refer cases to police. Occasionally, a targeted school employee sues the suspected culprit for defamation.

David L. Hudson Jr., a scholar at the First Amendment Center in Nashville, Tenn., has reviewed many such cases across the country and said the extent of school officials' jurisdiction remains unsettled.

Legal experts hope the Supreme Court will soon clarify the limits of school discipline for online speech that is posted offsite. Hudson told The Associated Press many school officials "would welcome further elucidation by the courts."

The two school districts argued Thursday that the postings can be disruptive at school, and said they need to be able to maintain order.

"The profile did create an immediate disruption which required immediate action," argued lawyer Jonathan Riba, who represents the Blue Mountain School District in eastern Pennsylvania.

A 14-year-old Blue Mountain student who had been cited for a dress-code violation created a fake profile of a principal purportedly from Alabama. She used her principal's photograph and described him as a pedophile and mentioned a sex act. The girl later apologized, took down the page and was suspended for 10 days.

"For a school administrator, one cannot be called a worse thing than a sexual predator of young children," Riba argued.

But Walczak said no one, including the principal, took the profile seriously, and that the parody is protected under the First Amendment. He suggested other remedies for such behavior, from talking with the student and parents to calling police or counselors.

The student's mother has said punishing the girl should have been left up to her.

In the other case, Hickory High School senior Justin Layshock created a parody that said his principal smoked marijuana and kept beer behind his desk. The Hermitage School District said it substantially disrupted school operations. Layshock was suspended and the principal sued him.

On Thursday, the judges threw a barrage of hypotheticals at the lawyers, asking if it mattered if the student intended to harm the target or if the offending site was accessed at school.

Chief Judge Theodore A. McKee suggested yet another response to the "buzz" among students about outrageous postings.

"Teachers might say this is a teachable moment," McKee said. "Maybe in retrospect, that's the best way to deal with it, to get the students talking about the hurtfulness of the conduct."

The court did not indicate when it would rule.

Internet Cafes Close Ahead of Exams in China

Teenagers tempted by computer games when they should be studying for the national college entrance exam this month won't have anywhere to escape to in central China, where Internet cafes have closed.

High school seniors gearing up for the massive national college entrance exams in Linchuan in China's central province of Jiangxi have been able to focus only on studying now that all of the town's Internet cafes have closed, said an official with the Linchuan culture affairs bureau, who refused to give his name as is common with Chinese officials.

"During this critical period, our goal is to create an educational society for students that is free of distractions," the official said. "Besides Internet cafes, there's not much else in town the kids can waste time with."

Each year, millions of students take the two-day test on a wide range of subjects, which is the sole determinant of their entry into university. Only about 25 percent of them get into university and the vast majority of those who don't make the cut go straight into the work force.

This year, about 9.5 million students are expected to take the exam on June 7 and 8, a slight dip from 10.2 million last year, according to a report posted on the website of the Communist Party newspaper People's Daily.

The immense pressure - which families share, often waiting anxiously at

hotels during exams - has prompted Ministry of Education officials to consider reforming the generations-old tradition.

China announced plans earlier this year to allow students to take subject-specific tests and introduce other measures besides the exam, such as considering leadership and volunteer experience, to ease the stress the students undergo as they compete for coveted spots in colleges.

Cheating is also common during the tests. More about 2,200 students were caught last year using wireless mini earplugs and other electronic devices that feed in answers.

Microsoft To Shut Down Bing Cashback

Microsoft plans to shut down Bing Cashback, the service that offered online shoppers cash rebates for buying products after searching for them on Bing.

It appears that the offering, which was based on technology developed by Jellyfish.com, a company Microsoft bought in 2007, didn't do as well as hoped.

Microsoft attracted more than 1,000 merchant partners who offered cash back to shoppers, said Yusuf Mehdi, senior vice president for Microsoft's Online Audience Business Group, in a blog post. "But after a couple of years of trying, we did not see the broad adoption that we had hoped for," he wrote.

Cashback will be available to users until July 30. After that, users will have a year to redeem any cash they earned through purchases.

Cashback was once central to Microsoft's push to position its search engine as one that was ideal for shoppers. It was also a service that Microsoft founder Bill Gates seemed particularly fond of. He often spoke about the potential for the offering to draw people to Microsoft search.

In May 2008 when the service launched, he described Cashback as a new advertising platform. Search advertising offers essentially nothing in return, compared to advertising on TV or radio, where users get content in return, he explained. Cashback "gives you a reason why you should use a particular search," he said at the time.

Cashback launched with some marquee names including eBay, Barnes & Noble, Sears, Home Depot, Zappos.com and Overstock.com. It launched with 700 merchants, so it grew only nominally over two years.

Internet Addicts Guilty of Starving Baby to Death

A South Korean couple were convicted Friday of abandoning their newborn daughter, who starved to death while they addictively played an online game raising a virtual child.

The husband, a 41-year-old taxi driver, and his 25-year-old wife were sentenced to two years in prison, but the woman's term was suspended

because she is pregnant.

The couple played at Internet cafes on average 10 hours every day and bottle-fed their baby only once a day, prosecutors said in an affidavit.

The girl, who was born prematurely and weighed 5 pounds (2.25 kilograms), was often fed rotten formula and was beaten when she cried out of hunger, the affidavit said.

They found her dead when they returned to their home in Suwon, just south of Seoul, after an all-night gaming session last September, the ruling said. They hid at a relative's home after a autopsy found the baby died of malnutrition.

"This constitutes an inhumane crime where the defendants abandoned even the most basic responsibilities as parents, and is unforgivable beyond any excuse or reason," the Suwon District Court said in the ruling.

The mother will avoid jail time if she stays out of trouble for three years. The couple, who have only been identified by their surnames, Kim, have seven days to appeal.

The case shocked South Korea and raised concern over the severity of online gaming and Internet addiction in the nation of 49 million. The government says there are 2 million "Internet addicts" in the nation considered one of the world's most technologically wired.

Man Implants Computer Virus in Hand

The BBC is reporting the story of Dr Mark Gasson from the University of Reading who implanted an RFID tagging chip with a virus in it in his hand. He then demonstrated that the chip was able to pass the virus on.

The device is a standard RFID tag of the type used in pets. Such chips use ambient electromagnetic energy to transmit small amounts of data. In the case of a pet the data is just a code which corresponds to the pet's ID.

In the presence of a vulnerability in the reading software, the tag can transmit malicious code as well. This has been demonstrated in the past as have other abuses of RFID. All that's really new here is that he put the chip under his skin. Since it works in cats and dogs, it's reasonable to assume it would work in humans.

I'm not sure what Gasson accomplished, other than to get himself in the BBC (and now pcmag.com. Anything accomplished with this chip can be done with a non-implanted chip that a person puts in their pocket or hides in their jewelry or eyeglasses. Gasson mentions that chips such as these are used in medical alert bracelets. Implantation is a cheap trick. And it's not like implanting it should be an effective way to hide it from a search. The right way to search for such devices is to search for the signal, not the chip.

As Gasson mentions, electronic device implantation is a growing field with pacemakers and cochlear implants as current examples. But all he has showed is that the devices which read wireless signals need to be hardened against attack, and that's hardly news.

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